

INTERVIEWING? DO YOUR HOMEWORK

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As a career coach, I sometimes forget that not everyone has heard the conventional wisdom about how to run a successful job search.

I recently met with a young engineering graduate who was looking for advice on how to land his first professional position. As we spoke, I advised him to “do his homework” when targeting a specific company. I’m so glad he had the courage to ask me: “I’ve heard that over and over, ‘do your homework.’ What exactly does that mean?”

Doing your homework means studying your potential employer. The company website is always a great place to start.

One must-read is the “About us” page. It usually offers a history of the company and short bios of the leadership staff.

You’ll also want to pay close attention to the pages about products and services. The pages that talk to the company’s customers will give you insight into what the company wants the customer’s experience to be. In many cases, you’ll play a part in delivering that customer experience. Look for their customer service tagline: “Going above and beyond to put customers” first (Zappos) or “Creating moments of magic with customers” (Southwest Airlines) or “Earth’s most customer-centric company” (Amazon.) You’ll also find out about their commitment to other values.

Look for key words that resonate with your own values and think about how you might use them in the interview. It’s not always possible, but if you have been a customer of the company, think about how you have experienced their products and how you would describe it. Be sure to let them know that you’ve been a customer.

If you really enjoyed the experience or product, let your interviewer know. Bonus points for thinking of ways they could improve. “I noticed that your website doesn’t allow customers to make reservations online. Have you thought about adding a system for that?”

Take some time to research competitors as well. You’ll be able to craft great questions for the interview like “How does your product compare to ABC Company’s model?”

Or “I see that XYZ Company has also started offering next day delivery. Are you considering it for your markets as well?”

Finally, the company’s career page is essential to your interview prep. Here, you’ll find specific information about what qualities the company values, what you’ll be doing all day and what the company culture is like. Do they emphasize fun and excitement? Innovation? Making the world a better place? These are the values that the interviewer will be keeping in mind as she looks for “fit,” an intangible but essential component of whether you’ll get an offer.



A job interview is basically a sales presentation, and a great salesman understands the prospect ahead of time. Doing your homework will help you prepare insightful questions for the interviewer, make a strong connection with values and position yourself as the best candidate for the job.

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